

SEXUAL VIOLENCE CAUSES TRAUMA

MAKE THE LEAP: LEARN MORE ABOUT THE TRAUMA IMPACTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

Trauma is the result of an event that is overwhelming.¹ It can have physical and emotional impacts. Trauma can result from powerful one-time incidents of any form of sexual violence. It can also happen when there are chronic or repeat experiences of sexual assault or sexual harassment.

Seeing another person being hurt can cause trauma too. Trauma takes many forms. Two people can undergo the same harmful event and one person might be traumatized while the other person doesn't seem to have any symptoms. Everyone is different.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE FEELINGS?

If you have experienced sexual assault or harassment, don't be surprised if you have strong and differing emotions such as confusion, denial, fear, shame, guilt, sadness, depression, rage, anger, and disbelief. Two of the most common effects of trauma are depression and anxiety. It is not a sign of weakness to be depressed or to feel anxious after a traumatic event. The experience is not something you can just "snap out of". Healing from trauma takes time.

Survivors of sexual violence may report:

- Feelings of helplessness and/or fear.
- Distressing memories of the event.
- Going to great lengths to avoid things that 'trigger' memories.
- Ongoing distress that lasts long after the event.
- A combination of sleep difficulties, difficulty concentrating, hyper vigilance, an exaggerated startle response, or irritability or outbursts of anger/rage.
- Flashbacks - images and memories of traumatic events that can surface suddenly without warning or when something is a reminder of the original trauma.
- Emotional flooding where feelings 'swamp' one's ability to think, as if the trauma is happening again.

LOOK FOR SUPPORT

If you have been traumatized by sexual violence, it's important to know that you can heal. The experience doesn't have to define you. Understanding trauma and how it operates in your life can be an important first step. Understanding trauma and how trauma functions can help you, and your family and friends make sense of your reactions and responses. When those close to you understand how trauma is affecting your behaviour, their responses and reactions can be more supportive.

Find support from people who understand trauma and the process of healing. Try not to become isolated. Your local sexual assault centre can support you.

¹ See RAINN: <https://www.rainn.org/effects-sexual-violence> and PreVAiL: Preventing Violence Across the Lifespan Research Network: <http://prevailresearch.ca/resources/>